

New England Missionary Wives, Hawaiian Women, and "The Cult of True Womanhood"

Patricia Grimshaw

Soon after their arrival in Hawai'i in 1820, and over the next three decades, New England missionary women embarked on an ambitious plan to transform Hawaiian girls and women to notions of femininity unheld by their culture. The experience of New England and Hawaiian intercultural contact was an ironical one that approached tragedy. The New England Americans sacrificed much personal comfort, suffered homesickness, ill health, and heartache, in their effort to transform Hawaiian lives. Yet they tended to attack, along with destructive elements in the processes of foreign incursion, many of the very aspects of Hawaiian culture which afforded Hawaiian women some measure of autonomy within their own social system. Meanwhile, the Americans were powerless to reproduce for their protégés the framework which afforded American women informal power within American society.

An event of 1825 is illustrative of the missionary aim to instruct Hawaiian females in "the cult of true womanhood." On a Sunday morning in early November of that year, Ka'ahumanu, awe-inspiring queen regent of the Hawaiian Islands, widow of the great warrior chief Kamehameha, was carried into the Christian mission chapel at Waimea for the morning service. The preacher was Samuel Whitney, his wife Mercy Partridge Whitney, New England Protestant missionaries supported by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. The Whitneys had arrived with the first contingent of missionaries in 1820, and had labored for five years, with their growing young family, on this unusual frontier. On this particular morning, Ka'ahumanu's bearers seated their chief's chair at the

Patricia Grimshaw teaches American history and Women's history at the University of Melbourne. She is at present writing a full-length study of women in the American mission.

The Hawaiian Journal of History, vol. 19 (1985)

front of the chapel, level with the preacher and, like him, facing the congregation.¹

To the joy of the mission band, this powerful queen had already submitted to instruction in reading and writing, and at a Honolulu school examination earlier in the year had written on her slate: "This is my word and hand. I am making myself strong. I declare in the presence of God, I repent of my sin, and believe God to be our Father."² This impressive matriarch, so enormous in size that Laura Judd, wife of the mission doctor, reported that "she could hold any of us in her lap, as she would a little child, which she often takes the liberty of doing,"³ had allotted tenancy rights for mission land, and had expressed the encouraging belief that a ruler belonging to Christ's family should not only serve God personally, but persuade her people to follow suit.

On this particular Sunday, however, Samuel and Mercy Whitney were not satisfied with Ka'ahumanu's behavior. This proud chief had placed herself symbolically on the same level as the preacher, God's representative. Moreover, it was essential that the minister face the entire congregation if play and disturbance were to be avoided. The missionary pair chided the queen who, her haughty and disdainful airs apparently a thing of the past, responded in humble fashion. Ka'ahumanu admitted her ignorance, and "begged them to tell her how to conduct herself at home, at church, in the house, eating and drinking, lying down or rising up. . . ."⁴

Mercy Whitney, who recorded this incident in her daily journal, expressed special approbation for Ka'ahumanu's clear perception of the degree of changed behavior now required of her. For acceptance into the full favor of the American missionaries, Hawaiians could not simply attend church and mission school faithfully. To be recognized as good Christians, they needed not only to regulate public and private behavior according to the new moral laws of the fledgling country. Hawaiians must also mediate every single aspect of their daily habits, trivial though they might seem, but all of which were evidence of the new heart, the reformed consciousness, that genuine conversion to Christ entailed.

The missionary general meeting in 1832 spelled out some of the mission's aims:

Resolved that while it is our main business to publish the word of God, we will discountenance the use and cultivation of tobacco; encourage improvements in agriculture and manufacture; habits of industry in the nation; neatness in the habits and dress of the inhabitants; punctuality in all engagements, especially in the payment of debts; justice

and temperance in the rulers in the execution of the law; and loyalty order and peace among their subjects in all the relations and duties of life.⁵

The women of the mission took as their special portion of this ambitious brief the "transformation" of Hawaiian girls and women to concepts of American femininity. Ka'ahumanu had at least realized the magnitude of the task they undertook, and clearly saw adherence to mission ways to be ultimately in her own best political interests. The majority of Hawaiian women remained ignorant of or baffled by the essentially changed order that the American women sought to create. The story of three decades of intercultural contact in Hawai'i, a story of frustration for the mission women and evasion by the Hawaiians, was fraught with considerable tension and unhappiness for both groups of women. Neither side could triumph: by the late 1840s, stalemate was reached.

MISSIONARY WOMEN ESTABLISH PRECEDENCE OF THEIR RELIGION

Mercy Whitney was one of the nearly 70 women, predominantly from New England or western New York state, who left America for Hawai'i, or the "Sandwich Islands," in the three decades from 1819 onwards. They were for the most part energetic, intelligent, and well-educated women, daughters of farmers or small businessmen, whose youthful ambition to serve on a mission led them to marry departing missionaries, often young men who were strangers to them. During the early national period in America, Protestant missionary outreach shifted from the native American Indians of their own west, to encompass non-Christian peoples of the new lands opened to the imagination by explorers and travellers. Captain James Cook had visited and named the Sandwich Islands in 1778, on his third and last great Pacific expedition. Yankee traders had brought Hawaiian youths to New England port towns; some had displayed an interest in Christianity. The churches planned and prayed for the conversion of this "interesting" people, and sent successive contingents of missionaries to accomplish this purpose.⁶

It was no accident that young women were found to dedicate their lives to this missionary work. Women were centrally involved in the religious revivals which swept the northeast during the early decades of the century, the so-called "second great awakening," which had provided metaphysical justification for a range of religious and charitable activity undertaken by women. Women were prominent in efforts to teach the young, reform slum dwellers, persuade men to

temperance, rescue prostitutes and, increasingly, to free Southern slaves. To quit home and family in order to bring the strongly-upheld benefits of Christian civilization to non-believers on a distant, exotic frontier was an uncommon but nevertheless strongly esteemed choice of reform endeavor.⁷ As Catherine Beecher wrote in her *Treatise on Domestic Economy* in 1842, "To American women, more than to any others on earth, is committed the exalted privilege of extending over the world those blessed influences, which are to renovate degraded man, and 'to clothe all climes with beauty'."⁸

Women's involvement in mission work was linked in an intricately complex fashion with the economic changes in women's labor, arising from early industrialization in the northeast, and a particular elaboration of notions of the family, and of femininity, that accompanied changes in material life. An appreciation of this social change makes more comprehensible the agenda which underwrote the mission women's activities in Hawai'i. As the integrated household economy of small farms and independent artisan industry began to break down with the introduction of mills and factories, a family structure involving the man as the sole breadwinner aligned with paid, public employment, the wife as the housekeeper removed from most productive labor, became dominant in growing urban areas. Poorer women were involved in wage labor. Married, middle-class women were portrayed in much prescriptive literature as the essential focus of an intimate, personal circle whose relationships contrasted radically with the alienated marketplace of male endeavor. Good family life would prove the catalyst for rejuvenation and reform in the fast-changing and potentially corrupt new social order. The articulation of proper femininity was needed to fit women to their role in this haven of domesticity. Puritan traditions had sustained a significant role for women in the God-fearing family. The ante-bellum period saw an enhanced elaboration of "the cult of true womanhood," in Barbara Welter's definition, involving piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity.⁹

The elevation of women's nature inherent in these fresh definitions of femininity contained within it the seeds of change in women's social and political roles. Women's supposed moral and spiritual value was used to stress a new competency for women in the public arena, initially within the orbit of social reform. Hence arose the decision of this particular group of American women to Christianize and raise the status of Hawaiian women to their own presumed level. Emerging from their own small worlds, sustained both by religious and national

enthusiasm, they were innocent of notions of cultural relativism, and prepared to designate every deviance from their own moral values as sinful, abroad no less than at home. When they reached their Polynesian destination it was inevitable that they would interpret what they saw within the set of cultural beliefs so deeply part of their own identities. Their ambition was an unshakeable and in their terms an exalted one, articulated by Laura Judd in this way:

I hope that in eternity I shall stand before the throne with a great company of Sandwich Islands mothers of children, who have attained that blessedness through my instrumentality. This object I would hold up before me, and aim at its accomplishment in the discharge, of all my duties, day by day, even indirect ones, such as attention to my domestic affairs, instructing the natives who assist me in my labors, and in training up my little ones in the way they should go.¹⁰

The various contingents of American missionaries established themselves first in the port towns and eventually spread to the most dense centers of population in the five main islands. The Hawaiian society on the fringes of which they lived was in the process of change as a result of decades of intercultural contact with explorers, traders, beachcombers and, finally, the missionaries. Some months before the first missionaries arrived, the religious system, the *kapu* laws, had been overthrown on the initiative of powerful chiefs, the islands' political leaders. Much of the social organization of traditional Hawaiian culture persisted, however, changing shape radically in some aspects, minimally in others, during the decades 1820 to 1850. For most of this time, a chiefly élite, the landowners, dominated much of the daily life of the commoners, the *maka'ainana*, in a style reminiscent of feudal society. Commoners labored as tenants on the chiefs' land, and surrendered much of the fruits of their labor to their superiors. The chiefs had for the most part shown eagerness to acquire western skills and western goods: indeed, the chief Kapi'olani complained to a gratified Lahaina missionary in 1825 that when among her fellow chiefs "I hear so much said about money, and cloth, and land, and ships, and bargains, that it makes me sick. . . ."¹¹

The labor of commoners was not usually especially onerous, since the land and sea provided plentiful nutritious food, but at times the fresh acquisitiveness of chiefs could drive the population to sustained and often excessive stints of labor. It appeared that pockets of impoverishment, physical deterioration, and the neglect of the care of the young was the result, exacerbated by the acceptability of alcohol and nicotine indiscriminately to men, women, and children. European diseases, too, took their toll, particularly the venereal

diseases that were all too often the undesired result of Hawaiian women's sexual relationships with foreign visitors, causing suffering and sterility.

The social status of Hawaiian women was closely intertwined with their class position and their place in the life cycle. Chiefly women wielded enormous power. As one missionary observed of the *konohiki* or headmen of his district: "... some, by the way, are women, for Paul's injunctions are not observed on the Sandwich Islands. Women often usurp the reins of government over large districts." Before the ending of *kapu*, such women had been subject to the definitions of the female sex as profane, or dangerous, inherent in the Polynesian dichotomy of male and female qualities, which had kept the sexes separate in both religious ritual and in such mundane areas as eating meals.¹² Chiefly women now were freed from such restrictions.

The lot of common women was similarly relieved by the ending of *kapu*, but they still shared with their menfolk restrictions on their autonomy arising from their inferior social status as a group. Subject to some extent to male physical domination, their social position was not, however, noticeably inferior to that of non-chiefly men. Except when chiefs drove commoners to unaccustomed toil, women were if anything advantaged by the usual division of labor which persisted through the mission period. Men undertook the bulk of heavy labor in building, fishing, and agriculture, and also cooked the meals. Women made mats and barkcloth, collected shellfish, and were more closely involved than men in the care of young children. Descent was traced through both the male and female line, but although patrilineal residence was the norm, women's family of origin remained their significant point of reference. Sexual relations were little restrained in early youth, and marriages were easily terminated. Chiefly men and women often had several spouses at the same time. Fertility was controlled by abortion and infanticide, and babies were often adopted among the extended kinship network which sustained significant material support systems.¹³

That the lives of Hawaiian women involved certain tensions in the decades after 1820 was not a figment of the American imagination. Nothing in the Hawaiian's situation, however, appeared even remotely constructive or acceptable to the self-appointed evangelists who saw Hawaiian women as their life-long cause. The men of the mission automatically undertook the dominant roles as preachers and teachers of men, delegating to women a share in the teaching of children and a special obligation to female adults. Hiram Bingham,

the foremost missionary in Honolulu, explained the strategy in this way: separating Hawaiian women for instruction gave the mission women a full opportunity to read scripture, pray, and "conveniently to give sisterly and maternal counsel to multitudes of their own sex" (conventionally, mission women would have had to cede priority to men in a mixed gathering). The separation similarly gave more scope for "the awakened native talent and zeal" of the Hawaiian women as well as men in church work. Thirdly, the separate instruction produced "a more perfect system of mutual watchfulness over the different members, and a more feasible mode of discipline."¹⁴ The American missionary women's active participation in direct mission work was, in practice, heavily curtailed by their decision to segregate their own young from Hawaiian influence, and at various stages of their life cycle they participated only peripherally in formal teaching.¹⁵ Laura Judd's characterization of the facets of mission women's influence, however, displayed the various ways in which they transmitted their cultural prescriptions.

Arriving as they did at a critical period of Hawaiian cultural change, the American missionaries made rapid headway in persuading chiefs to a sympathetic interest in their religious system, and the adherence of Ka'ahumanu and other chiefs to church attendance and support of the mission effected a swift conversion of the populace, remarkable when compared with the situation facing missionaries in the east. Granted that western incursion was already setting in motion great change, the Christian chiefs undoubtedly believed that by welcoming the new religion and becoming leaders in the fledgling church, their own political hegemony would be best preserved.¹⁶ Commoners began attending church because the chiefs commanded them to do so. As the Hilo missionaries told the home mission board in 1833, church attendance had not been voluntary, but in obedience to the commands of their chiefs. Hawaiians had "put on the profession of true religion and engaged in the performance of its external duties," but all that had been secured was "a prompt though thoughtless, servile and sycophantic audience. . . ."¹⁷ Hawaiians were listless at meetings, according to Mary Parker, and could be moved neither to fear or anger: "They submit wholly to what you say, ever having been accustomed to it." If a chief told them to go to meeting, they immediately complied, but they simply did not know enough to become Christians.¹⁸ Meanwhile, despite new laws governing theft, murder, and adultery, old ways of living condemned over and over again by the missionaries persisted.

The problem of how to bring about the genuine, deep-seated change in the hearts, minds, and consciences of Hawaiians pre-occupied mission thinking. In the last analysis, their strategy for reform came to rest on that institution so stressed in their own culture: the family. Family relationships in Hawaii appeared chaotic, so that neither could children, the citizens of tomorrow, nor adults find reinforcement for decent behaviour in the one place where altruistic and uplifting relationships were essential. "It is impossible to conjecture who are husbands and wives, parents and children from their appearance assembled on the sabbath or at any other time," one missionary wrote. "Nothing of that courtesy and attention is shown to each other by persons most intimately related as in the Christian population."¹⁹ Where, asked Fidelia Coan, were the dutiful sons, virtuous daughters, chaste wives, and faithful husbands of home?²⁰ Here, said a missionary at Waimea, was "none of that mother's fondness of her darling child and that child's attachment to its affectionate mother which is seen in enlightened America."²¹ Another asserted: "Parents have no just notion of what is expressed by the term education. The mind, the heart and disposition of children are entirely disregarded, and so little care is taken even of their bodies that most of them find an infant's grave."²²

Rather than in state, church, or school, a reform endeavor should be shaped around the family life of Hawaiians, and it was the mission women, themselves examples of American domestic customs, who spearheaded this effort. Above all, the women singled out the Hawaiian wife and mother as the agent for "regeneration." Hawaiian women were presented with the model of American femininity, presented with the full force of the American's material wealth, skills, undeniable altruism, and forceful personal attributes. Hawaiian women should be rendered genuinely pious, sexually pure, dutifully submissive, and domestically oriented as housewives and mothers. Then, as the center of a better ordered family, their influence would ripple outwards, redeeming not only wayward children and errant husbands but the whole kingdom for godly living.

The foremost goal of the American mission women was to convert Hawaiian women to a genuine piety, the mainspring as they saw it of all worthy moral behavior. The Americans led Hawaiian women in sex-segregated prayer meetings, held classes for women after the Sunday services, or made time available in their own homes to hear Hawaiians "tell their thoughts" on religious matters. Charlotte Baldwin, for example, during a period of increased religious interest,

set apart a room in her house where, "when not engaged in personal conversation, she could resort with pious females for prayer; and when she was not able to be with them, they prayed there by themselves . . ." ²³ One newly arrived single missionary, Maria Patton (later Chamberlain) found the American women's efforts impressive. At Lāhainā in 1828 she witnessed Clarissa Richards, "sitting in the midst of 200 females addressing them on divine truths," women who sat with solemn expressions and "big tears stealing down their cheeks. . . ." ²⁴ Mary Ives admitted that she ensured a good attendance at the female prayer meeting she conducted in Honolulu only by making her way, her infant in her arms, a mile around the village "ringing the bell long, and loud. . . ." ²⁵ A determined effort was mounted and sustained for the souls of Hawaiian women. The souls of the heathen, they told themselves often, were of "incalculable worth."

NEW ENGLAND EDUCATION INSTITUTED

For Hawaiian women to reach a direct and vital relationship with their Maker, however, wider instruction was needed than the bare elements of the Christian faith. Hawaiian women needed a formal western education, so that they could read the Bible and other spiritually-uplifting literature, and attain the spiritual refinement of sensibility and understanding gained through a liberal education. Most of the American women themselves had felt the benefits of an education in the new female seminaries of the northeast in their youth. Some had fought hard to attain such a higher education, and indeed many young mothers on isolated mission stations continued to shake themselves awake an hour before dawn to pursue their studies in Euclid, or geology, or Greek. Hawaiian women, too, not just young children, would be offered the fruits of this learning.

And so, in daily or weekly sessions, the American mission women taught Hawaiians to read and write and count, and for the more forward scholars the curriculum included geography, geometry, and philosophy. The Americans, devoid of customary teaching aids beyond the simple readers put out by the mission press, devised ingenious ways of matching the needs of the situation. Hawaiian women, for example, brought seeds to school for counting lessons, wrote on smooth sand with sticks, and confronted homemade maps and globes which the mission women sat up nights to construct. Charlotte Baldwin at Waimea in the early 1830s held a school for

female teachers every day (women who would in turn teach other Hawaiians), and on two days a week a school for 300 women, as well as working with children.²⁶ Such onerous work loads were representative of efforts made by brides until babies appeared, by the childless, or by those whose children had been sent away to school.

Despite the distractions of infants in arms, Hawaiian women showed interest in acquiring basic literacy. Indeed, they showed an aptitude which compared well with Americans in the opinion of Mercy Whitney, surprising considering "their habits of sloth and indolence, being unaccustomed from infancy, to apply their minds to anything which required thought or the exercise of their mental faculties."²⁷ The links between such pursuits and piety were frequently stressed. Sarah Joiner Lyman's attitudes in her educational work at Hilo were common. Many women in her school for females aged eight to 60 years might not be expected to make remarkable progress, but the school at least brought scholars more regularly under the means of grace. When Sarah, on her sporadic visits to Hawaiian homes, found illiterate Hawaiian women, she made clear the implications for Christian devotion. On one occasion she found two women in their hut peeling baked taro, and wrote that, with both unable to read and write, "their prospects for eternity were as dark as their circumstances were miserable in this life."²⁸

When Maria Ogden first joined the mission station at Waimea in 1829, she wrote approvingly of the schoolroom for Hawaiian women: "Their seats and writing tables are chiefly made of those boards, on which the natives used to spend much of their time, sporting in the surf."²⁹ The use of surf boards in such an enterprise was both practical and symbolic. If women were to be pious, they must be weaned away from pastimes that were far from moral, and what better way to do so than by offering the substitute of education for their customary games and amusements? No Hawaiians appeared to the missionaries to have enough work to do, and some missionaries felt it valueless to urge them to greater labor while an autocratic government prevented the people from personal accumulation. Their free time was spent in swimming and surfing, in cardplaying, boxing matches, games, cockfights, hulas, and traditional games of skill or chance. Not only were these games seen as a useless waste of time, but they were inextricably mingled with such sins as gambling, and with sexuality of an overt kind which appeared subversive to Christian morals.

The women, whose labor appeared even less onerous than the men's,

seemed particularly in need of those alternative pursuits which Christian education could offer: Bible reading groups, church meetings, school examinations, Sunday school picnics, tea meetings, as well as formal classroom instruction. Choir work in particular attracted the American women's interest since they missed the good music of their home congregations. Maria Patton described such a choir rehearsal at Lāhainā, where "twenty-four genteely dressed Hawaiian ladies sat opposite the same number of gentlemen with an elegant table sporting three glass lamps placed between them."³⁰

In choirs, as in so many pursuits, American hopes were often thwarted. Mary Parker told a friend that she could hardly keep herself from laughing sometimes, the Hawaiians sang so laboriously. "Nature seems not to have designed them for the best of singers."³¹ Her reaction to singing mirrored a deep-seated skepticism about the depth of genuine piety the mission women's activity had really achieved. Newly arrived women could be impressed at the sight of a large group of Hawaiian women led in prayer by one of their number in a style not too far removed from expected forms. Those American women who had been years in the field, however, felt increasingly that the manifestation of piety was superficial. When a religious revival which swept the largest island and increased church membership rapidly (as opposed to mere attendance), many mission women were unmoved by the local missionaries' elation. Titus Coan, an evangelist in the mode of Charles Finney, reported that a "beloved" missionary sister in a frank and honest confession had written: "If there were only a few hundred we could believe, but there are so many it spoils it all."³² "We tremble, yet know not what to say, nor scarcely what to think," Sybil Bingham told a mission friend, musing on the "fickleness" of the Hawaiian character.³³

PIETY TO REPLACE SEXUALITY

The essential thrust of the American women's strategy was to substitute piety for the sexuality which seemed to be the dominant drive in Hawaiian women's activities. The effort to induce notions of sexual purity extended far beyond prohibitions on "promiscuous" bathing and sexually suggestive dances. While the American women saw monogamous marriage as the sole legitimate avenue for the expression of physical sex, their own notions of purity clearly accepted such sexuality in a relatively positive way. To be confronted with a society, however, in which matters concerning the body were

explicitly, publicly, and unselfconsciously presented was shocking. Nudity, urination, defecation, and, above all, intimate sexual relations appeared crude and scarcely subject to even minimal regulation, insensitive as they were to the cultural bases of Hawaiian sexual behaviour.

The Kailua missionaries complained in 1831 that "the sin of uncleanness" clung to Hawaiians like leprosy, even to church members despite the two-year probation period the ministers imposed. There was little concern or watchfulness over one another; Hawaiians herded together in the same small house and slept together on the one mat. Missionaries blamed "the unceremonious manner of intercourse between the sexes, without any forms of reserve or any delicacy of thought and conversation.—The idle habits of all, especially the women, and their fondness for visiting from home at night—and the force of long established habits."³⁴ "The degradation of the *females* in this spot deeply affects my heart," wrote Clarissa Richards. "On this subject I could *write* much—but delicacy forbids."³⁵ And her husband explained to the home secretary of the mission board that the three great barriers to female licentiousness that existed in New England were absent in Hawaii: public opinion, modesty, and real ignorance.³⁶ The missionaries sought to establish and sustain monogamous marriage, acting wherever possible to stamp out premarital and extramarital sexuality, and encouraging Hawaiians to cover nude bodies (incitements, it seemed, to promiscuity) with decent clothing in western style.

New instruction on the marriage state was spelled out clearly in a pamphlet, *A Word Relating to Marriage*, prepared for mission purposes. Marriage meant one partner, in a relationship lasting for life. Prostitution, adultery, and "male and female impersonations" were sins of the flesh. Marriages forbidden by God, such as those between close blood relatives, were prohibited. Couples should not marry too young, but wait until their bodies grew stronger and their characters more developed. Partners should be close in age, so that they shared many interests; they should know each other well, understand each other's commitments, and love each other. They should have joint residence and own all property together.³⁷ Divorce was sanctioned only in the case of adultery or wilful desertion, where mediation had failed.

Missionaries did not require couples married Hawaiian style to submit to a Christian service, lest every married person in the islands should feel perfectly free to consider their current relationships null

and void and to swap partners at will, but they insisted that all future liaisons be blessed by the Church. Female and male chiefs, however, who had more than one spouse, were to choose one and relinquish the rest. One chiefly woman of Kailua claimed to have had no fewer than 40 husbands, usually several at the same time, and a male chief seven.³⁸ Samuel Whitney asked him whether so many wives did not give rise to some anxiety. "Yes, much," replied the chief, "I can not sleep for fear some other man will get them!"³⁹ Such irregularities were insupportable in the political leaders of the country. They were encouraged to introduce stringent punishments for bigamy and adultery: indeed, by the late 1820s in Lāhainā, errant subjects were being forced to pay for their sins by making roads (men), or confinement in irons (women).⁴⁰

Marriage ceremonies were not usually lavish affairs; frequently, a number of couples stood up together at the end of a normal service to be married by the preacher. Chiefs' marriages, however, provided an opportunity for a spectacle and some feasting, kept within bounds not offensive to the Americans. It was an occasion for silks and satins, uniforms and swords, scarlet umbrellas, processions, and a multitude of witnesses. By contrast, Clarissa Armstrong described a marriage her husband celebrated of two commoners, an older man to a young girl about 18. The bridegroom was dressed in an old shirt, a piece of native cloth or *Kapa*, and an old hat, and the bride in a dirty undergarment, a piece of white cotton cloth tied around her, and a native bonnet. "It was ludicrous to see them, he with his great bare legs, and she bare feet—yet it was solemn. The girl said she wanted to be married—she said more that I *cannot* tell you."⁴¹

"Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled, but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge," thundered preachers from a favorite Hebrews text. It was easier to get Hawaiians to the altar, alas, than to restrain "whoremongers and adulterers" thereafter. The most clearcut case of irregularity that the mission could bring under some degree of surveillance was the sexual trafficking between Hawaiian women and foreign sailors off visiting ships. Initially such exchange of sexual favors for material goods was welcomed by Hawaiian girls, who may even have hoped to absorb *mana*, or divine strength, from the god-like white men.⁴² As well as material goods, however, the exchange often entailed unwanted pregnancies, uncontrollable venereal disease, jealous male violence, and where a Hawaiian woman had been abandoned after several months of cohabitation, penury. Whatever the subtleties of sexual politics in

this interchange, the mission women viewed it within the model of their own society, as sheer exploitative prostitution. They wept when, a fresh ship in port, their young female scholars turned a deaf ear to instruction and went off in the boats with pleasurable excitement.⁴³ They were in the forefront of pressure on chiefs to try to prevent this trade, with an anger made more intense by their daily contact with girls whose bodies were covered with syphilitic sores, and with women rendered sterile from venereal disease.

The American women railed against their compatriots who, as Mercy Whitney believed, once away from the constraints of civilized society, conducted themselves like brutes, with no sense of shame and decency, and gave loose to "all the corrupt propensities of a sinful and depraved heart."⁴⁴ One wife, Mercy reported, had embarked for a voyage for her husband's health, but got off the ship when she found the captain had a mistress on board. Clarissa Richards was admired for her stand when her husband was besieged by angry sailors from the ship *Daniel* in Lāhainā in 1826, blaming the missionary for the chief's proscription on sexual trading. "I am feeble," declared Clarissa, "and have no one to look to for protection but my husband and my God. . . . I wish you all to understand that I am ready to share the fate of my husband, and will by no means, consent to live upon the terms you offer."⁴⁵

Hawaiian brides may have decked themselves out with clothes for weddings and prayer meetings. For much of the time the rule that the body, particularly the breasts, ought to be clothed at all times was one held without conviction, while the myriad rules governing appropriate dress to match various occasions was hardly won. One of Maria Chamberlain's first actions after acquiring some of the Hawaiian language was to exhort women at Waikīkī, in faltering tongue, "to be modest, to tell their neighbors it was a shame to go exposed and without kapa as we had recently seen some of them. . . ." Mary Parker's first sight of Hawaiians inspired a chill of disappointment: "naked, rude and disgusting to every feeling."⁴⁶ Frequently clothes were removed for work or for bathing. The American women pressed clothes on to their parishioners, sewing early and late for chiefs and teaching the skill to as many women as would heed them. Their first success was to persuade women, at least in the sight of westerners, to wear a cotton shift with a skirt of Hawaiian cloth wound around their waists, and eventually a style of dress, patterned on their own nightgowns became common usage. Women would then sit wet through in church services if they had

been caught in rain, but they still customarily removed wet clothing when they were outside (their own bark cloth had been liable to disintegrate when wet: a mission son reported hilarious scenes when a congregation, emerging into a heavy shower, calmly removed their clothes and walked off home with the cloth in rolls under their arms).⁴⁷

At times success seemed imminent. At a school examination at Waimea in 1829, the women decked themselves out in silk gowns, black with white headdresses or green with yellow headdresses.⁴⁸ The high chief Kapi'olani, defier of the goddess Pele, won acclaim, described by a mission daughter in this way:

Her hair was becomingly arranged with side puffs, and a high tortoise shell comb, which was the admiration of our childish eyes. Her feet were always clad in stockings and shoes . . . on public occasions, or when visiting away from home, she wore a tight fitting dress, not even adopting the "*holoku*" (or "Mother Hubbard") which afterwards became the national style. Silk and satin of the gayest colors were the chosen dress of the chiefs but she preferred grave and quiet shades.⁴⁹

Yet for the most part the women were pained at the sight of inappropriate dress even among the chiefs: rich satin dresses with bare feet, expensive mantles over cotton shifts. Other Hawaiian women showed a tendency to see clothes as ornamentation rather than to cover nakedness. When straw hats were introduced to replace flower wreaths, women loaded them with bows of dyed *kapa* ribbon and extended the brims to enormous proportions. Leg of mutton sleeves, padded with cloth, ballooned out voluminously.

The proper balance in dress was a rare achievement, indeed, as rare as the reordering of sexual accessibility they had tried to impose. Marriage was no security against the sin of adultery, mourned Clarissa Armstrong in 1838. No fewer than nine quite young girls who attended meeting regularly and heard religious instruction every day had been guilty of adultery.⁵⁰ Unless some honest way was laid out "for the people to supply their new and clamorous wants," wrote Laura Judd from Honolulu in 1841, "wives and daughters will continue to barter virtue for gain," just as the other sex resorted to extortion and theft.⁵¹

The American missionaries always looked askance at the marriage of Christian believers to non-believers, but particularly so when the non-believer was the wife. The problem specially involved in this case was the proper submission that a wife owed to husbandly authority: "in the marriage contract," the mission asserted, "the woman surrenders herself to the authority and control of the husband

in a sense materially different from the surrender of the husband to wife (though the husband's authority cannot contravene the authority of Christ which is always paramount)." It was this consideration that led them to oppose, also, older chiefly women's marriages to youths where there was a great disparity in rank, age, or influence, "for the wife would probably surrender her superiority reluctantly if at all; or the youth might exercise his authority in an unseemly manner." If the older partner were a male chief, the tension would not be as severe: "There is not the same danger of unwelcome usurpation, or competition for supremacy," as there was of discontent and unfaithfulness.⁵²

The concept of submissiveness as a feature of feminine behavior and personality was not unproblematic for the mission women themselves, as the reminder that the Christian conscience was the ultimate arbiter of authority hinted. Most certainly the women did not equate "submission" with any notion of passivity, weakness, or ineffectualness. Courage, determination in a rightful cause, and moderate assertiveness were all qualities the American women often displayed and certainly esteemed. Indeed, such attributes were essential if women were to engage, as seemed essential, in charitable and religious concerns in the community. As daughters they had shown deference to their parents' opinions, and as wives they were undoubtedly prepared, should an irreconcilable difference arise, to yield to a husband's judgment, just as they assumed that a husband's interests preceded their own. Yet, partly because the gender division of labor was clearly spelled out in the marriage, and partly because much of their activism was conducted in a sex-segregated style, submissive behavior in the conventional sense seemed rarely to be called for. The notion of women's moral leadership in the marriage offered, in any case, a countervailing source of power to that given the man by right.

The mission treatise on marriage instructed Hawaiians that the husband was head of the wife and should love, nurture, and care for her. Wives, in turn, should reside in proper conduct under their husbands, and, through the fine example they set in living without sin and in the fear of the Lord, would influence their husbands to the good.⁵³ One of the reasons the mission women waged their campaign against customary amusements of the Hawaiian women was based in the need to encourage those personal qualities of gentility that matched the submissive wife's role. "The females, too, at the other end of the village are assembled for female fights, that is, *pulling hair*,

scratching and *biting*," wrote two missionaries of the boxing craze among their community.⁵⁴ Women used alcohol and smoked to excess, and these induced indelicate, hoydenish behavior. Involving women in the organizational and educational work of the church, teaching, leading prayer groups, preparing parish functions, not only offered women alternative occupations, but pointed them in the path of an effective community activism which could be reconciled with deference to the dominant sex.

Hawaiian women were begged to change their ways, and, in particular, wives were urged to combine their interests more closely with their husbands'. "The property of a husband and wife are perfectly separate," one missionary complained. "*Hoapili* [a chief] and his wife have two perfectly distinct establishments, they rarely eat together. No man ever uses his wife's book and vice versa and so of a slate and other property, each must have one of his own."⁵⁵ When Hukona, one of Clarissa Richard's servants, was guilty of "delinquency" while assisting Fanny Gulick, another mission wife, Clarissa insisted that the woman should remain with Fanny, "and that she live quietly with her husband and submit herself cheerfully to his authority and theirs." She could return to visit the Armstrongs and her relations after Fanny's confinement, but Clarissa did not want Hukona to feel that her services were indispensable: "if she does not love her husband, nobody wants her."⁵⁶

KINSHIP AND CHIEFS' POWER ATTACKED

It was the kinship network, the "relations," that many missionaries realized was the stumbling block to much submissive wifely behavior. Their own culture upheld dutiful deference of young unmarried daughters to the authority of parents. Hawaiian women, however, sustained links with their family of origin which superceded their ties with their husbands throughout their lives. Their roles as sisters, daughters, nieces took precedent over the marriage bond as representing the reference point for status. American women expected a married woman to have status conferred by the husband. Hawaiian women were involved in strong bonds of reciprocity with their kin, for material, emotional, and physical support, and such demands frequently drew wives from the marital home. Increasingly, as European diseases ravaged the population, they were called upon to nurse sick relatives some distance from their homes. Maria Chamberlain articulated common exasperation with the strength of

kinship ties: "If we should give the natives in our family a whole hog or goat they would boil it up and share it with their friends and then perhaps go without any meat for 2 or 3 days."⁵⁷ The functional value of such behavior escaped the missionaries.

It was not, however, merely the force of the kinship network which the Americans saw undermining proper lines of authority. They abhorred the continuing power of the chiefs over the lives of individual members of the family except where this influence was exercised on behalf of the church. Mary Ives described such an incident that epitomized chiefly tyranny at Hāna. A young girl had brought Mary two eggs to buy a needle. A chief, observing the transaction, seized the eggs and angrily told the girl she had no right to sell eggs without asking him. As the girl fled in shame Mary recalled her, gave her a needle, and remonstrated with the chief—who did not take her advice in good spirit.⁵⁸ If a chief detained a Hawaiian in some place distant from his home and family, wrote Sarah Lyman, the man did not even express a wish to return, even if he was detained six months or a year: "Such veneration they still have for chiefs."⁵⁹ Parents and children were taxed in articles which could not be obtained in the neighborhood, another complained, and chiefs ordered them to tasks which meant that they had to go away for days and weeks at a time.⁶⁰ For women to be dutiful wives, continuity in cohabitation and material subsistence was essential, and the Americans looked forward to the time when the despotism of chiefs would be ended, while they expressed regret at individual chiefly acts in the meantime.

The teaching of submissiveness, then, was intimately related to the encouragement of women to lead a domestic-oriented existence based on a gender division of labor in the American mode. Mission teaching was explicit on this point: "It is the husband's role to work out-doors—he farms and builds the home and prepares that which concerns the welfare of the body. The role of the wife is to maintain the house and all that is within. It is her responsibility to look after the husband's clothing and the food—the household chores—setting in place the sleeping quarters and all else that is within." The wife was advised against deficiency in this area: "It is wrong to neglect work and to leave the husband to keep the household. It is right to remain within the house and to work without daydreaming, providing food, clothing and all that is essential for life together."⁶¹ And by such domestic devotion, the wife would foster the husband's love for the children. The married couple should guide children, as Solomon said, on the correct path. If husband and wife loved each

other, their love for their children would be great, and the children would not abandon their parents in later life.

The reality of Hawaiian domestic life was far from the ideal projected by the Americans. When Abigail Smith arrived at Kalua'aha in 1833, she was driven to distraction by Hawaiian women coming to observe her performance of domestic chores. She begged them to go home to their household duties and the care of their children so she could get on with her own tasks undisturbed. They asserted cheerfully that they had no duties and continued unabashed to occupy her yard and doorway.⁶² On several occasions when Hawaiian women saw the Americans ironing they said with heartfelt sympathy, "I pity you."

The simply constructed Hawaiian houses, with their sparse furnishings, together with the plainness of diet and dress militated against the mission plan. One Waimea missionary, Lorenzo Lyons, described Hawaiian living in characteristically derogatory fashion: The houses were "rude hovels" entered by a three foot high doorway. The interiors were filthy, with all family members and their animals living, eating, and sleeping together, amidst smoke from the *kalo* fire. Men, women, and children, the married and the unmarried, slept together on a single mat, without partitions. Breakfast was a calabash of *poi*, placed on the floor and eaten with the hands, sometimes accompanied by raw fish. They had tried in vain to persuade the people "to live like human beings," Lyons said, to put away dogs, give up tobacco, build better houses, make tables and seats, use separate dishes and eating utensils, make fences around their houses, and cultivate the soil more extensively.⁶³

Apart from the chiefs, who built western style houses, just a few of the better-off church families lived in anything resembling western style, such as thatched mud-walled cottages sporting separate sleeping places for children, a shelf of books, an engraved map on the wall, home-built furniture, and wooden bowls and spoons.⁶⁴ Some learned to bake bread and cakes to replace what to the Americans seemed undesirable elements in their diet: "They eat almost everything crabs worms and every sort of thing that lives in the form of shell fish," wrote Juliette Cooke in disgust.⁶⁵ By contrast, one evening in 1825 a chiefly couple visited a mission family to discover six of them dining on toast, with a little forcemeat. With exclamations of sympathy for their poverty and hunger, the chiefs hastened away to send them fish and potatoes. "Great is our compassion for you," they said.⁶⁶

But, for the most part, the Americans considered the Hawaiians' homes and diet totally un conducive to the performance of a day's domestic work by Hawaiian women. When the mission women went house-to-house visiting, it was usually only the sick, the lame, the blind, the maimed, or the old that they found at home—not a busy and welcoming Hawaiian housewife.

It seemed to the Americans that vast material improvement among commoners was dependent on breaking the hegemony of the chiefs. In the meantime, as they sought a cash crop which might give Hawaiian men employment and livelihood, they sought an avenue of household production for the women. One proposal was to induce Hawaiian women to spend more time sewing and knitting, since this not only afforded domestic occupation, but provided the clothing so sorely needed by the whole population, and the clothes would generate occupation in mending, laundering, ironing, and storing. The most concerted effort was the attempt to initiate cloth-making in the homes, that old skill of American women which was swiftly being overtaken by factory production back home. In 1834 a middle-aged spinster, Miss Lydia Brown, was sent to the islands to spearhead this enterprise. The mission board justified the appointment of Lydia, "a woman of superior mind and character," in these terms: "It is certainly of the utmost importance to make employment, and to create a necessity for it, for the people of the Islands. And it is very desirable to exert every influence on them that will be likely to produce among them industrious, orderly families." The Hawaiians, therefore, should be trained in the domestic manufacture of cloth. "On these and other accounts, it is not desirable that the manufacture of cloth by machinery should be introduced among them. . . ." ⁶⁷ And a number of Hawaiian women were intrigued by the process, keen to try it, until they saw how coarse was the cloth of their own manufacture, and until more and more imported cottons made home spinning and weaving superfluous for the same reason it had become so in America.

NEW ENGLAND STYLE CHILD CARE ADVOCATED

The persuasion of Hawaiian women to devote more time to childcare was similarly a frustrating task. "In our opinion," stated the Lāhainā mission report in 1833, "all that ever has been written on the subject of a mother's influence, has come far short of giving it the high rank which it really holds. Could the influence of a pious mother be brought to bear upon the children of Hawai'i, then these

islands might be transformed. . . . Otherwise it will be the work of ages to change the character of the nation's children."⁶⁸ The children, all the missionaries agreed, were growing up like wild goats in the field. The only way to get them to school was to seek them out and bribe them with books in exchange for attendance. To keep them in school, the teachers had to sustain the children's interest constantly, no small task considering that the knowledge which Hawaiian children attained appeared to bear no relevance for their future employment. If made the objects of anger or corporal punishment, the children deserted in decisive fashion. One missionary described their activities: "From morning to night, ungoverned by their parents, almost naked, ranging the fields in companies of both sexes, sporting on the sand-beach, bathing promiscuously in the surf, or following the wake of some drunken sailors. . . ."⁶⁹ Something had to be done.

That something involved the formation of Maternal Associations at each station, devoted to the task of explaining to Hawaiian women the serious business of rearing godly children. On occasions, with caution, a mission wife brought in one of her own offspring for brief display.

Instruction began with a sharp and anguished attack on abortion and infanticide. Abortion, "base and inhuman practises," were suspected to be common but difficult to detect.⁷⁰ Mercy Whitney, reporting that she had seen a child with an eye put out by his mother "in endeavouring to kill him" before his birth, commented, also, on the common practice of former years, infanticide: "They seemed to think but little more of killing a child, than they would an animal."⁷¹ Most mission women reported that the incidence of infanticide declined swiftly, however. This was very likely due to the high infant mortality rate from introduced diseases, if for no other reason.

In these circumstances, mission pressure turned to what missionaries viewed as neglect of babies. Imagine, wrote Lucy Wilcox, echoing many women's accounts, "a female with a piece of kapa around her body—hair in all directions—on her back or in her arms a little infant covered with filth and dirt and usually so sore with itch that you cannot find a place on its back, head or face that you can put down your finger." The mothers did not wash infants' heads, she said, because they feared that water would enter through the fontanel.⁷²

The mission publication, *A Few Words of Advice for Parents* (1842), cautioned mothers against leaving their infants to cry in another's

care while they went off wherever they wished. Infants should be fed only breast milk, not fish, or *poi*, or sugarcane juice. But beyond everything else, infants should not be given away to relatives, but reared by their biological parents in the one home. This common practice was seen, not just as the chief cause of the high infant mortality, but the reason for the entire lack of discipline over older children. Sarah Lyman expressed the usual exasperation at this practice when, at a Maternal Association meeting at Hilo, she failed dismally to compile a neat list of mothers and children. Thirty women attended, but it proved impossible to discover exactly how many children they had, as "their *real* mother, grandmother, aunt, nurse and perhaps someone else" would all claim the one child.⁷³

Consequently, as the children grew more independent, it proved impossible for parents to exert strong control over them: as one Hawaiian mother after another explained, if they were nasty to their children, the children simply rolled up their mats under their arms and moved on to be welcomed by a related household. One Hawaiian mother described how she had tried to hit her disobedient child with the rod: the child spat in her face, bit and scratched her, tore her clothes, and then ran away for several days. If Hawaiian mothers had been accustomed to govern their children, instead of being governed by them, it might have been a simple matter to substitute alternative advice. But, said Fidelia Coan, "The most simple directions we can give, presuppose, in many cases, more knowledge, more skill, more advancement in the art of governing a family than they have attained."⁷⁴

It was arguable from observing non-Christian mothers that good Church members were a little less likely to give up their infants for adoption and attempted to control their children a little more firmly. Certainly, where the wife was an unbeliever and a Christian father exerted parental authority, his efforts were clearly undermined: the wife would intervene if he tried to whip a child and set up a fearful wailing. "It is true here, as in civilized lands," wrote one missionary, "that the female fills an important sphere and may be the means of doing *much* mischief or *much* good. . . ."⁷⁵ For the most part, however, even Christian women resigned themselves to a continuation of their usual practices. We hear your advice, but we forget it quickly, they goodnaturedly told the mission wives. Anyway, they felt convinced that American children were genetically different: it was inconceivable that Hawaiian children could be so well-behaved.

On occasions Hawaiian women could express gratitude to American wives for their unswerving reform efforts. Maria Chamberlain had that happy experience one pleasant day in May, 1831. As a Hawaiian woman sat by Maria's baby's cradle, brushing the flies off his face, she said to Maria that Hawaiians were fortunate that the missionaries had come with wives to the islands. Formerly, she said, Hawaiians had known nothing of taking care of children, gave newborn babies to others, and knew nothing of domestic happiness. "Husbands and wives quarrelled, committed adultery, drank, lied, stole—Now we wish to obey the word of God, to live together with love, to take care of our children and have them wear clothes as the children of the missionaries."⁷⁶ Such praise was a rare treat and one which the mission women, in any case, came to regard with some skepticism. Penetrating the Hawaiian mind was a baffling task. "It is exceedingly difficult to ascertain the true character of this people," wrote Nancy Ruggles after 13 years in the islands. "The expression of the lips merely, is no sure indication of the state of the heart." The missionaries, for example, frequently detected Hawaiians relating as their own experience what they had actually learned from others.⁷⁷ It was true, said Maria Dibble, that before her arrival she knew little "of the character if they may be said to have any, of a heathen people. Language cannot convey to you a just idea of their ignorance. . . ."⁷⁸ Another missionary spelled out one of the major problems of communication: "Unless every trifling particular is named they rarely have the judgment to carry out the principle themselves. They suppose they have complied when they observe the particular act forbidden."⁷⁹ Scholars in the schools learned to pronounce the words, but that was all. They did not understand the essential *meaning*. Since some Hawaiian teachers taught their pupils to read from right to left, or from the bottom of the page to the top, this latter was not so surprising.⁸⁰

By the time the second decade of mission work was nearing its end, without the style of reformation they craved becoming visible, many missionary women began to express the discouragement that had never, in any case, been far beneath the surface. They had God on their side; they had sacrificed a good deal to come to Hawai'i; they felt exhausted in the cause; the population was ostensibly Christian; and some change in women's behavior had taken place. All Hawaiian women, however, fell far short of the desired model of true womanhood that they had tried so hard to impose. "What in me hinders their salvation?" Lucia Smith plaintively asked her friend Juliette

Cooke, as she watched women drift away from her instruction.⁸¹ Many another mission sister echoed her painful self-assessment.

CHARACTER FORMATION OF CHILDREN RE-EMPHASIZED

Forceful and efficient fresh male missionaries who arrived in Hawai'i in the 1830s, horrified by what they saw as the slow progress of the mission's work, began to question the decision of earlier missionaries to devote so much of their effort to the reformation of adults. A renewed onslaught, many felt, should be made on the character formation of Hawaiian children. Lorrin Andrews, principal of the Lahainaluna Seminary, founded on Maui in 1831 to offer advanced education to young Hawaiian men, was one who came to this opinion. "*We must begin with children or the most of our labor must be lost as far as civilization and mental improvement are concerned,*" he told fellow missionaries with some vehemence.⁸² He himself, and his co-workers, became disillusioned with their work with young men when they encountered sexual immorality both within the Seminary and among some graduate teachers in the community, who used their new status to gain sexual favors from female pupils.⁸³

While others agreed on renewed emphasis on children, the teachers of day schools felt their task an impossible one. Children, said one missionary, lost the salutary effects of religious instruction by "mingling with their vicious parents and others and observing all their heathenish and polluting habits and practices."⁸⁴ No sooner, reiterated another, did one alert children to their "filthy and indecent appearance," to the evils of quarrelling and lying, when they returned to the "beastly indifference" to good behavior or even the sneers of those with whom they associated back home. The solution seemed difficult but obvious. The mission must educate children, but in sex-segregated boarding schools where they could be removed from their parents' influence.⁸⁵ The missionaries in Hawai'i knew that their fellow missionaries in Ceylon were finding this a constructive approach. The graduates of the girls' and boys' boarding schools were marrying and entering the community as Christian leaders.⁸⁶ A beginning on this policy was made. Lahainaluna was converted to a high school for young boys in 1837, and the Wailuku Girls' Seminary, for girls aged six to ten years, was opened at a discreet geographical distance.

At Wailuku, under the principal Miss Maria Ogden, Hawaiian girls aged six to ten received the training in true womanhood that

the female missionaries had tried to offer adult women. Their daily schedule revealed much. Girls rose before dawn for prayers, set the tables, cleaned their rooms, washed, combed their hair, and came down to breakfast at the sound of the bell. Some girls were rostered to wait at each meal. The girls sewed from 7.30 a.m. to 9.00 a.m., studied till midday, and again after lunch from 2.00 p.m. to 4.00 p.m. Another hour's sewing preceded supper at 5.00 p.m., followed by a scripture reading and prayer. On Saturdays the scholars scoured the dining room, schoolroom, tables, basins, aprons, plates, knives and forks; they washed and ironed their clothes, neat uniforms of sensible cottons. They learned at the school the basic elements of formal education combined with an apprenticeship in female arts and crafts.⁸⁷ By 1839, however, Dr. Judd recommended some improvement not only in the quality of their diet but in the time allotted for physical exercise, when serious illness resulting in deaths occurred at the school. It seemed impossible, the missionaries concluded, "to restrain them from rude and romping behavior, and to confine them to those exercises deemed more proper for females without serious injury to health."⁸⁸

DISENGAGEMENT FROM THE ENTERPRISE

The 1840s saw a slow period of disengagement by many missionary wives in active involvement in the mission, which they lamented in an increasingly hopeless fashion. It was impracticable for most children to be confined for years in boarding schools, although this was one area in which a small group of women remained involved. Their efforts with the Hawaiian women appeared to bear little fruit, and the Americans faced the gloomy experience of watching many of their most precious converts dying prematurely during the epidemics which swept the islands. "Surely this people are melting away like dew. . . . What we do for them must be done quickly," wrote Sarah Lyman in her journal in 1838.⁸⁹ Another missionary wrote: "We bless the Lord and take courage but, oh, what a dying people this is. They drop down on all sides of us and it seems that the nation must speedily become extinct."⁹⁰ The mission women's nursing skills seemed more in demand than any other offering they could make. By the 1850s, there was often little to distinguish the mission women's daily round and preoccupations from many of their sisters' lives back home, the exotic character of their environment notwithstanding.

A young American, staying in the Hawaiian islands for his health in the 1830s, described his missionary aunt's activities, and the Hawaiian response, in an ironical yet sympathetic fashion:

My aunt could work, scold, preach, wash, bake, pray, catechize, make dresses, plant, pluck, drive stray pigs out of the garden. There was nothing useful in this wilderness which she could not do. She exercised an influence from her energy and practical virtue which bordered on absolute authority. As I walked with her through the village, her presence operated as a civilizing tonic. True, the effect in many cases was transient. But the natives knew what she expected. As she appeared, tobacco pipes disappeared, idle games or gambling were slyly put by, Bible and hymn books brought conspicuously forward and the young girls hastily donned their chastest dresses and looks. . . .⁵¹

His characterization of this intercultural relationship nicely captures both the single-minded effort of missionary women and the apparent conformity but essentially evasive response of Hawaiians. It also exemplifies the style of outsiders writing about mission women, the tendency to stress a comic element in the encounter. In truth, however, the endeavor of the American missionary women could easily be described as comedy but more nearly is tragedy.

The American women attempted what was, given the circumstances, basically a constructive role in the process of social change in Hawai'i which it is easy to overlook. Hawaiian culture was being subjected to intense pressure for adaptation because of the rapid incursion of foreigners into their community. The missionaries were only one element, and from an immediate economic perspective the least exploitative element, in this capitalist and colonialist invasion. Granted that change in Hawaiian culture was inevitable, what, in fact, the American missionaries offered Hawaiian girls and women was initiation into that range of skills and behavior that would ensure some successful negotiation of the new order. Ka'ahumanu, the queen regent, was astute enough to recognize this fact.

The constructive nature of the American women's enterprise has tended to be overlooked partly from a tendency of historians, themselves products of the same work-oriented society, to envy, and to enjoy vicariously, the lives of those Polynesian island dwellers who were innocent of Puritanical drives. Yet there seems little basis in fact for describing Hawaiian women's lives as romantic or idyllic, either in their pre-contact world or in the period of change of the 19th Century. This tendency to denigrate the missionary women's efforts is intensified by the trappings of Victorian gentility which necessarily surrounded their agenda, particularly with respect to sexuality. Yet the formal and informal education in western forms

which the mission women, alone of their sex, were prepared to offer, would alone enable Hawaiian women to function in a world increasingly dominated by this alien culture. Such Hawaiian women who were "successful" in 19th Century Hawai'i served an apprenticeship in the American mission program.

Yet ultimately the New England women's activities would prove of only marginal value to the vast majority of those Hawaiians who survived the ravages of imported diseases. Clearly a wide range of cultural beliefs and practices were bound to persist, and among these notions of masculinity, femininity, and personal familial relationships were bound to be most persistent. Moreover, the American prescriptions of femininity were based on economic organization which it proved impossible to replicate for indigenous Hawaiians. The male breadwinner, the independent artisan, the small farmer, the wage earner, supporting a wife and family in modest but independent comfort, was a dream that faded before it could emerge. Eventually large plantations and businesses emerged headed by foreign capitalists, employing non-Hawaiian labor for the most part. The bulk of Hawaiians remained outside of the prosperity of this new Hawai'i. The relative affluence of Hawaiian families, the gender division of labor in western style, desired by the Americans, remained elusive goals. It was no wonder that western cultural constructs of gender characteristics proved unattainable.

NOTES

I wish to acknowledge the help of Lela Goodell and Mary Jane Knight of the HMCS Library and Barbara Dunn of the HHS Library. All archival sources unless otherwise noted, are in the HMCS Library, Honolulu.

¹ Mercy Whitney, Journal 1821-1860, 16 November 1825.

² *MH*, July 1825.

³ H. A. P. Carter, *Kaahumanu* (Honolulu: R. Grieve, 1899) 26.

⁴ Mercy Whitney, Journal, 16 November 1825.

⁵ Sandwich Islands Mission 1832, *Extracts from the Minutes of a General Meeting of the Sandwich Islands Mission* (Oahu: Mission Press, 1832) 133-134.

⁶ John A. Andrew III, *Rebuilding the Christian Commonwealth: New England Congregationalists and Foreign Missions 1800-1830* (Lexington: U of Kentucky P, 1976).

⁷ Patricia Grimshaw, "'Christian Woman, Pious Wife, Faithful Mother, Devoted Missionary': Conflicts in Roles of American Missionary Women in Nineteenth Century Hawaii," *Feminist Studies*, 9, 3 (1983): 489-522.

⁸ Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1984) xiii.

- ⁹ Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood 1820-1860" *American Quarterly* 18 (1966): 151-174. See, also: Nancy Cott, *Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1977); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg "Beauty, the Beast, and the Militant Woman: A Case Study of Sex Roles and Social Stress in Jacksonian America," *American Quarterly* 23 (October 1971): 562-584.
- ¹⁰ *Mother's Magazine*, 1 July [1833].
- ¹¹ *MH*, August 1826: 240.
- ¹² F. Allan Hanson, "Female Pollution in Polynesia?" *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 91. 3 (September 1982): 335-383.
- ¹³ See Irving Goldman, *Ancient Polynesian Society* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1970); and Marshall Sahlins, *Social Stratification in Polynesia* (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1958).
- ¹⁴ Hiram Bingham, *A Residence of Twenty-one years in the Sandwich Islands* (1847; rpt. Rutland, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle, 1981) 365.
- ¹⁵ Patricia Grimshaw, "'Christian Woman, Pious Wife, Faithful Mother, Devoted Missionary'."
- ¹⁶ See Kerry R. Howe, *Where the Waves Fall* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1984); and Gavan Daws, *Shoal of Time: A History of the Hawaiian Islands* (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 1974).
- ¹⁷ Sheldon Dibble, "Review of 'A Visit to the South Seas' by Rev. C. S. Stewart," n.d. [c 1831], ABCFM Hawaii Papers.
- ¹⁸ Mary Parker, Journal (A), Voyages to Hawaii and Marquesas 1832-1833, June 1833.
- ¹⁹ Sheldon Dibble, "Review of 'A Visit to the South Seas'. . . ."
- ²⁰ *Mother's Magazine*, 1837.
- ²¹ Lorenzo Lyons, letter to ABCFM, 6 September 1833, ABCFM Hawaii Papers.
- ²² Sheldon Dibble, "Review of 'A Visit to the South Seas'. . . ."
- ²³ Mary C. Alexander, *Dr. Baldwin of Lahaina* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1952) 91.
- ²⁴ Maria (Chamberlain) Patton, letter to sister, 19 May 1828, Missionary Letters.
- ²⁵ Mary Ives, letter to R. Anderson, 12 March 1849, ABCFM Hawaii Papers.
- ²⁶ Dwight Baldwin, Report of Waimea Station, June 1832, Mission Station Reports 2.
- ²⁷ Mercy Whitney, Journal, 30 September 1834.
- ²⁸ Sarah Lyman, Journal 1830-1863, 24 January 1837.
- ²⁹ Peter Gulick, letter to ABCFM, 27 April 1829, ABCFM Hawaii Papers.
- ³⁰ Maria (Chamberlain) Patton, letter to sister, 20 August 1828.
- ³¹ Mary Parker, letter to Mrs. L. Frisbie, April 1836, Missionary Letters.
- ³² Orramel and Ann Gulick, *The Pilgrims of Hawaii* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1918) 172.
- ³³ Sybil Bingham, letter to Nancy Ruggles, 16 August 1838, Missionary Letters.
- ³⁴ *MH*, July 1832.
- ³⁵ Clarissa Richards, Journal en route to Hawaii 1832-1833, Journal Collection.
- ³⁶ William Richards, letter to Rufus Anderson, 7 December 1832, Missionary Letters.
- ³⁷ Ephraim Weston Clark, *A Word Relating to Marriage* (Honolulu: Mission Press, 1833) trans. from the Hawaiian by Carol Silva.
- ³⁸ *MH*, October 1829.
- ³⁹ Samuel Whitney, Journal at Kauai, 2 April-1 June 1826, ABCFM Hawaii Papers.
- ⁴⁰ *MH*, February 1829.
- ⁴¹ Clarissa Armstrong, Journal 1831-1838, 29 October 1832, Journal Collection.
- ⁴² Marshall Sahlins, *Social Stratification in Polynesia* 40.

- ⁴³ Maria Ogden, letter to Maria Chamberlain, n.d. [1833?], Missionary Letters.
- ⁴⁴ Mercy Whitney, Journal, 10 December 1829.
- ⁴⁵ *MH*, February 1827.
- ⁴⁶ Maria Chamberlain, Journal 1825-1849, 8 December 1829, Journal Collection: Mary Parker, Journal (A), 31 March 1833.
- ⁴⁷ Samuel Armstrong, *Richard Armstrong: America: Hawaii* (Hampton, Va: Normal School P, 1884), 43.
- ⁴⁸ Peter Gulick, letter to ABCFM, 27 April 1829.
- ⁴⁹ Persis G. Taylor, *Kapiolani* (Honolulu: Robert Grieve, 1897) 6.
- ⁵⁰ Clarissa Armstrong, Journal 1831-1838, 4 February 1838.
- ⁵¹ Laura Judd, letter to Mrs. R. Anderson, August 1841, Missionary Letters.
- ⁵² Sandwich Islands Mission 1837, *Extracts from the Records of the Hawaiian Association from 1823 to 1836* (Honolulu: Mission Press, 1837) 13-14.
- ⁵³ Ephraim Clark, *A Word Relating to Marriage* 4.
- ⁵⁴ Ephraim Spaulding and W. Richards, *A Brief History of Temperance for Twelve Years at the Sandwich Islands . . .*, written 15 December 1831, ABCFM Hawaii Papers.
- ⁵⁵ Lorrin Andrews, letter to ABCFM, 2 December 1835, ABCFM Hawaii Papers.
- ⁵⁶ Clarissa Richards, letter to Fanny Gulick, April [1834], Missionary Letters.
- ⁵⁷ Maria Chamberlain, letter to sister, 11 March 1830.
- ⁵⁸ Mary Ives, letter to aunt, 21 January 1838, Missionary Letters.
- ⁵⁹ Sarah Lyman, Journal 1830-1863, 4 January 1835, Journal Collection.
- ⁶⁰ Lorenzo Lyons, letter to ABCFM, Report 1836, ABCFM Hawaii Papers, Missionary Letters.
- ⁶¹ Ephraim Clark, *A Word Relating to Marriage* 5.
- ⁶² Mary D. Frear, *Lowell and Abigail: A Realistic Idyll* (New Haven: privately published, 1934) 71.
- ⁶³ Lorenzo Lyons, Report on Waimea Station 1837, ts., Mission Station Reports 1.
- ⁶⁴ *Mother's Magazine*, February 1839.
- ⁶⁵ Juliette Cooke, Extracts from a Journal 1837, Journal Collection.
- ⁶⁶ *MH*, September 1825.
- ⁶⁷ B. Wisner, letter to missionaries at the Sandwich Islands, 23 June 1834, ABCFM HEA Papers, Letters to Missionaries.
- ⁶⁸ *MH*, September 1834.
- ⁶⁹ Sheldon Dibble, *A History of the Sandwich Islands* (1843; rpt. Honolulu: Thos. G. Thrum, 1909) 267.
- ⁷⁰ Lorenzo Lyons, letter to ABCFM, n.d. [1836?], ABCFM Hawaii Papers.
- ⁷¹ Mercy Whitney, Journal, 24 October 1828.
- ⁷² Ethel Damon, ed., *Letters from the Life of Abner and Lucy Wilcox* 1836-1869 (Honolulu; privately printed, 1950) 107.
- ⁷³ Sarah Lyman, Journal, 17 January 1837.
- ⁷⁴ *Mother's Magazine*, October 1837.
- ⁷⁵ Cochran Forbes, letter to ABCFM, 23 July 1836, ABCFM Hawaii Papers.
- ⁷⁶ Maria Chamberlain, Journal 1825-1849, 11 May 1831, Journal Collection.
- ⁷⁷ Nancy Ruggles, letter to Rev. and Mrs. S. Bartlett, 27 June 1833, Missionary Letters.
- ⁷⁸ Maria Dibble to Mary[?], 9 September 1833, Missionary Letters.

- ⁷⁹ Cochran Forbes, letter to ABCFM, 10 October 1836.
- ⁸⁰ Mary Parker, Journal (A), June 1833.
- ⁸¹ Lucia Smith, letter to Juliette Cooke, 5 May [1838], Missionary Letters.
- ⁸² Lorrin Andrews, letter to ABCFM, 2 December 1835.
- ⁸³ Lorrin Andrews, E. Clark, and S. Dibble, letter to ABCFM 1836-1837, ABCFM Hawaii Papers.
- ⁸⁴ Lorenzo Lyons, letter to ABCFM, Report 1836.
- ⁸⁵ Hervey Hitchcock, letter to ABCFM, April 1836, ABCFM Hawaii Papers.
- ⁸⁶ R. Wisner, letter to missionaries at the Sandwich Islands.
- ⁸⁷ Maria Ogden to Maria Chamberlain, 27 June [1837?], Missionary Letters.
- ⁸⁸ Sheldon Dibble, *A History of the Sandwich Islands* 284; Gerritt P. Judd IV, *Dr. Judd: Hawaii's Friend* (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 1960) 95.
- ⁸⁹ Sarah Lyman, Journal, 22 January 1838.
- ⁹⁰ Orramel and Ann Gulick, *The Pilgrims of Hawaii* 159.
- ⁹¹ Henry Restarick, *Hawaii 1778-1920: From the Viewpoint of a Bishop* (Honolulu: Paradise of the Pacific, 1924) 50-51.